



Domestic Violence Housing First

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, as many women who flee their abusers have no place to go, face discrimination, and often are temporarily unable to work. With the aim of eliminating housing as a reason that survivors stay in an abusive relationship, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV) has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and a group of service providers across the state to create the Domestic Violence Housing First program.

The program focuses on helping survivors retain or access safe permanent housing quickly—often bypassing emergency shelters. Women and children also receive tailored services based on their unique needs, including such supports as transportation subsidies, career training, job-related expenses, child care, necessities for children, and temporary rental assistance.

This flexible approach to support gives survivors the ability to establish a home and the freedom to choose how best to rebuild their lives. Modeled after the housing first approach that has proven successful with homeless populations for over a decade, Domestic Violence Housing First meets the unique needs of many domestic violence survivors in Washington.

Domestic Violence Housing First gives DV advocates the flexibility necessary to address the evolving safety needs of individual survivors through these four key service components:

- 1. Tailored Services, Mobile Advocacy**

Advocates meet survivors where they are – tailoring advocacy services to their unique needs. Advocates go where survivors need them – in-home or at a safe, accessible place identified by the survivor. Survivor defined service needs may fall outside the scope of traditional DV services such as learning how to drive, how to budget, or how to shop for economical, nutritious food.

- 2. Practical, Temporary Financial Assistance**

Every survivor's financial situation is different. Advocates work with survivors to understand what their needs are and to provide practical, temporary funding assistance to address those needs – whether it's a deposit on an apartment or to repair or purchase a car so employment and financial stability are achievable. Participating service providers have found that when survivors have the freedom to choose, they select the supports most critical to helping them stay housed.

- 3. Housing Search Support**

Finding housing can be an overwhelming experience. Advocates work with survivors to help make the housing search process more manageable. Advocates meet with survivors to determine what their housing needs are and present a realistic range of options. They also help determine what steps should be taken – from improving credit scores to identifying low-income housing – to get the family into a home or help them stay in their current home.

- 4. Landlord and Housing Authority Relationships**

Many landlords and housing authorities view survivors as high-risk tenants. Core to Domestic Violence Housing First is dispelling this myth, outlining the legal requirements for working with families, and educating these key stakeholders that survivors can be reliable renters. The service approach also highlights for landlords the value of the extra support that comes with advocacy and case management for these tenants.

Cohort Learning Community

The program has been structured as a learning community of four services providers from around the state that have piloted the service approach since late 2009: Eastside Domestic Violence Program in King County, Womenscare Shelter in Whatcom County, YWCA of Kitsap County, and the Family Resource Center of Lincoln County. This cohort has met frequently to learn from each other's work and to support each other in implementing this new approach to services. WSCADV provides convening and coordination support to the cohort, as well as technical assistance to each service provider.

Population Served

171 survivors and their children were served by the program from September 2009 to June 2011.

Housing status: 56% of survivors had permanent housing when they entered the program, 23% came from a shelter, and 17% were homeless. 51% of survivors had been evicted in the past.

Demographics:

- Age: 76% of survivors who entered the program were 44 years of age or younger.
- Race/Ethnicity: 52% of survivors were European American/White; 13% African American; 13% Hispanic/Latino; 9% Asian/Pacific Islander; 2% Native American; 11% unknown.
- Income: 66% had a monthly income of \$800 or less, with almost 1 in 10 (9%) having no income at all. 34% were employed.



Results to Date

With less than two years of data and a service approach that is still evolving, early results are preliminary, but promising.

Housing Access and Homelessness Prevention:

- 93.8% of participants receiving services for at least six months accessed or retained permanent housing and were still housed at six months.
- 80.4% of participants receiving services for at least 12 months accessed or retained permanent housing and were still housed at 12 months.

Depth of Services:

- With service levels tailored to each family's needs, of the 143 families served 9/1/09 to 3/31/11:
 - 62% received a light level of services, defined as discrete needs that can be met quickly, e.g. one month's rent, new locks, employment related license fees, etc.
 - 24% received a moderate level of services, with discrete financial needs met, along with provision of a deeper level of ongoing advocacy and connections to additional internal and external services such as legal support.
 - 14% received a high level of services, with discrete financial needs met, and intensive longer-term advocacy services needed to support survivor safety and housing stability.
- Data on subsidy levels is still preliminary, but in addition to advocacy services, each family received an average of approximately \$2,200 in direct financial assistance – though specific amounts varied widely depending on each family's needs.

Impact on Survivors and Advocates

Service provider staff credits the flexible service approach with these results. In addition to the housing stability outcomes noted above, in interviews staff has identified these five key successes:

1. Seeing survivors succeed helps prevent staff burnout
2. More effective collaboration, communication and cross-referrals among internal staff
3. Increased referrals from and to other community partners
4. Development of more relationships and deeper mutual trust with landlords
5. Several families involved in the child welfare system retained or regained custody of their children through involvement in the program

Survivors served through the program have said:

- "It's not just housing, it's a sense of identity."
- "I came from [living in a car] to doing a dual degree in school."
- "I just feel like a 750 pound rock has been lifted off my shoulders."

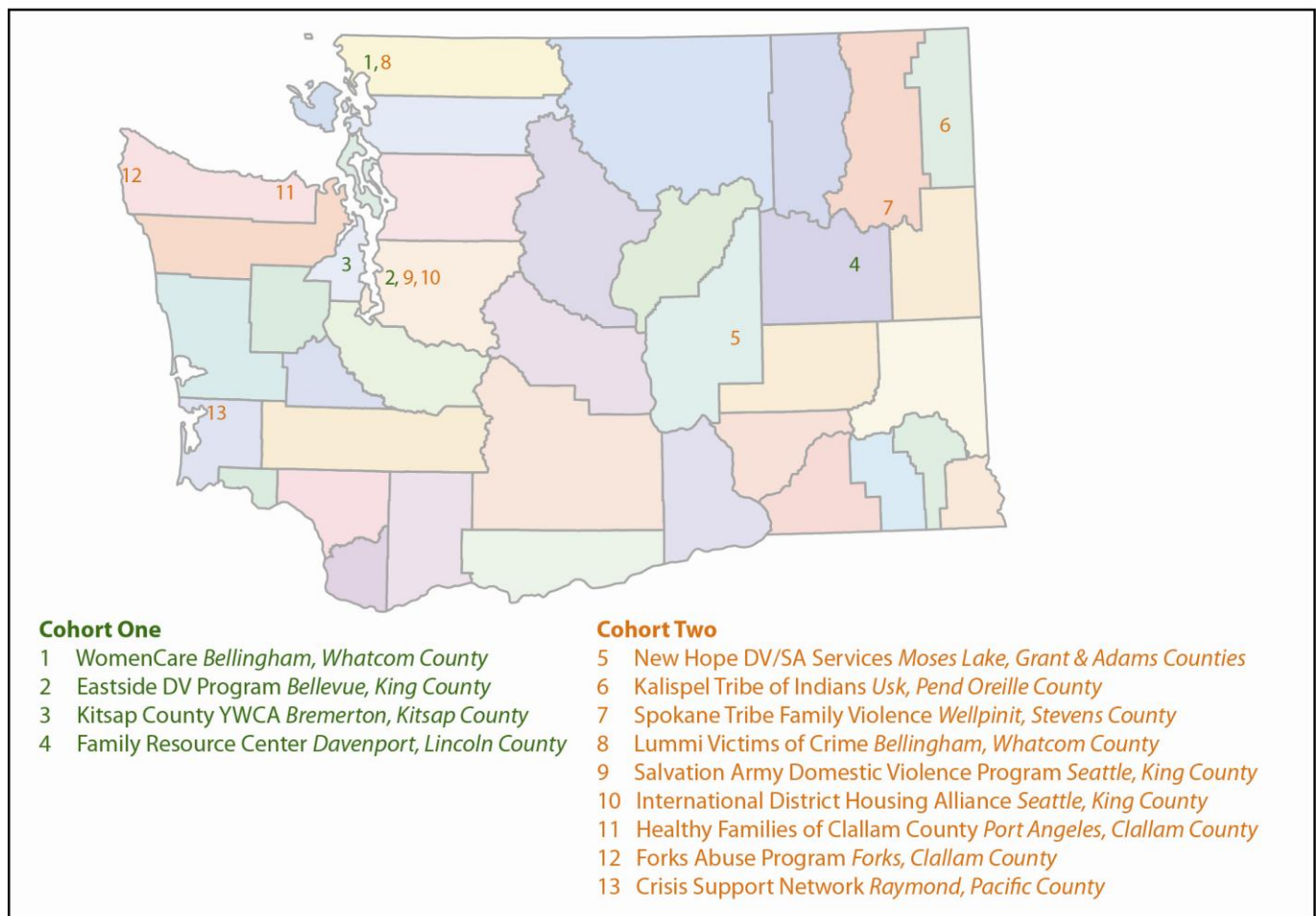
Program Expansion

The first phase of the program has demonstrated that Domestic Violence Housing First provides a safe alternative to shelter stays for many families recovering from domestic violence – and may offer a new pathway to the prevention of homelessness. Based on these promising initial results, WSCADV and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, with additional support from Empire Health Foundation, have expanded the program to continue to refine the service approach and to further assess its impact.

Nine new DV service providers in Washington state have been selected to join the program. This second cohort of service providers brings new perspectives and expertise – particularly in meeting the needs of underserved populations. The next phase of the program will focus on exploring:

- How to adapt the service approach to meet the needs of a wider range of survivor populations
- The depth and types of services needed to support housing retention over a longer period of time
- The cost effectiveness of the service approach
- The financial models and organizational capacity needed by service providers to sustain the service approach over a longer period of time

Participating DV Service Providers



Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (WSCADV) mission is to end domestic violence through advocacy and action for social change. Founded in 1990 by survivors and their allies, WSCADV is a non-profit network of domestic violence programs. These programs serve survivors all over the state. WSCADV serves these programs by providing "advocacy support"—the training, technical assistance, and other resources that support the work of our member programs. It also informs policy makers, the media and others concerned about domestic violence. To learn more, visit www.wscadv.org or join the conversation on Facebook (WSCADV) and the WSCADV blog at canyourelate.org.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

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